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Message Text

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ACTION PM-05

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 DODE-00 CIAE-00
INR-10 NSAE-00 MCE-00 L-03 AID-05 EB-08 ACDA-12
SS-15 OMB-01 TRSE-00 NSC-05 SP-02 /089 W
----------114331 240336Z /64
P 240109Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 429
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 4618

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, IN, PK, SW
SUBJECT: INDIAN ACQUISITION OF A DPSA: THE VIGGEN DECISION

REF: STOCKHOLM 1156

1. WHILE NEW DELHI IS IN NO BETTER POSITION THAN EMBASSY STOCKHOLM TO EVALUATE ALL THE FACTORS WHICH WILL INFLUENCE THE USG DECISION CONCERNING PERMISSION TO SWEDEN TO SELL INDIA THE VIGGEN, WE WOULD LIKE TO COMMENT ON THE LIKELY INDIAN REACTION TO A USG REFUSAL TO PERMIT THE SALE.

2. SUCH A REFUSAL WILL CERTAINLY NOT STRENGTHEN INDO-US RELATIONS. HOW SERIOUSLY IT MAY STRAIN THEM IS DEBATABLE AND DEPENDS IN PART ON TIMING AND HOW THE MATTER IS EXPLAINED.

3. THUS FAR THE INDIAN PRESS AND MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMENTATORS HAVE NOT DEALT WITH THE REQUIREMENT FOR USG ASSENT TO THE SALE OF THE VIGGEN, IF THEY HAVE BEEN AWARE OF IT AT ALL. IN THE EVENT OF A US TURNDOWN, THE PUBLIC REACTION WILL THEREFORE BE ONE OF SURPRISE. IT WILL PROBABLY BE LESS
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NEGATIVE THAN IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IF THE PUBLIC HAD MORE TIME TO FOCUS ON THE US ROLE. THIS, HOWEVER, WILL BE A MATTER OF DEGREE ONLY, ASMOST INDIANS PROBABLY WILL BE CRITICAL OF A US REFUSAL TO PERMIT THE SALE AS PATERNALISTIC AND UNWARRANTED INTERFERENCE IN THEIR AFFAIRS. THE US WILL BE SEEN AS UNFAIRLY DENYING INDIA WHAT IT NEEDS TO DEFEND ITSELF.

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4. JUST HOW NEGATIVE THE INDIAN REACTION WILL PROVIDE WILL DEPEND SIGNIFICANTLY ON WHAT THE SCENARIO OF THE VIGGEN TURNDOWN IS. THE MOST SERIOUSLY ADVERSE REACTION WOULD DEVELOP IF THE INDIANS PUBLICLY DISCLOSED THAT THEY HAD OPTED FOR THE VIGGEN, AND THEN LEARNED THAT THE US HAD VETOED THE DEAL. WE WOULD URGE THAT SUCH A DEVELOPMENT BE HEADED OFF. IF WE ARE GOING TO TURN DOWN THE VIGGEN WE SHOULD DO SO QUICKLY. REACTION TO LEAKED WORD THAT WE HAD REJECTED SWEDEN'S FORMAL REQUEST BEFORE THE INDIANS HAD REACHED ANY FINAL DECISION ON WHICH PLANE THEY WANTED WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE EASIER TO DEAL WITH HERE.

5. ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE USG VETOES THE SALE OF THE VIGGEN, WHAT SHOULD BE OUR STRATEGY IN DEALING WITH THE LIKELY INDIAN REACTION? IN THE PAST A PRINCIPAL ELEMENT IN INDIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE US HAS BEEN THE PERCEPTION THAT THE US DISCRIMINATED IN FAVOR OF PAKISTAN. IN THIS CASE WE SUGGEST THAT A NEGATIVE DECISION ON THE VIGGEN BE EXPLAINED TO THE INDIANS, BOTH THE GOI AS WELL AS INTERESTED PRIVATE PERSONS, AS IDENTICAL TO OUR POLICH CONCERNING THE SALE OF THE A-7 TO PAKISTAN. IN THAT CASE THE PRINCIPAL REASON FOR REFUSING THE A-7 TO PAKISTAN WAS OUR CONCLUSION THAT IT REPRESENTED THE INTRODUCTION OF A MJAOR SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS SYSTEM INTO SOUTH ASIA, CONTRARY TO OUR ARMS TRANSFER POLICY. IF THE DEPARTMENT WERE TO CONCLUDE THAT THE VIGGEN SUFFERED THE SAME DISABILITY AS THE A-7, WHICH JUDGING FROM PM DIRECTOR GELB'S CONVERSATION WITH THE SWEDISH AMBASSADOR IS ALREADY THE CASE (STATE 74389), WE WOULD THEN BE IN A POSITION
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TO INFORM THE INDIANS THAT OUR POLICY FOR THE SUBCONTINENT WAS INDEED EVENHANDED. WHILE WE HAVE NO ILLUSIONS THAT THIS ARGUEMENT WOULD TURN PUBLIC OPINION AROUND IN OUR FAVOR, WE BELIEVE IT IS THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE CASE TO MAKE.

6. IN CONTRAST, THE POINT ABOUT US POLICY PROHIBITING COPRODUCTION OF SIGNIFICANT WEAPONS, INTERPRETED TO INCLUDE LICENSED PRODUCTION, WILL PROBABLY GO DOWN BADLY HERE. IT WOULD BE REPRESENTED, HOWEVER WE PUT IT, AS AN EFFORT TO DENY MODERN TECHNOLOGY TO A DEVELOPING COUNTRY. WE WOULD HOPE THAT IN ANY STATEMENTS, THE COPRODUCTION ASPECT BE GIVEN A DISTINCT SECOND PLACE, IF IT IS MENTIONED AT ALL.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, FOREIGN RELATIONS, NEGOTIATIONS, MILITARY SALES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978NEWDE04618
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780129-0752
Format: TEL
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780328/aaaaaxob.tel
Line Count: 107
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
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Message ID: d4f037be-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION PM
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STOCKHOLM 1156
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3212428
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDIAN ACQUISITION OF A DPSA: THE VIGGEN DECISION
TAGS: MASS, PEPR, IN, PK, SW
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d4f037be-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
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Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014